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ACTION PRM-00

INFO LOG-00 AF-00 TEDE-00 IO-00 OIC-00 OIG-00 SAS-00
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FM AMEMBASSY ACCRA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8414
INFO AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE
AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE
USMISSION GENEVA

C O N F I D E N T I A L ACCRA 000829

SIPDIS

KINSHASA PASS TO BRAZZAVILLE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/18/2015
TAGS: [PREF](#) [GB](#) [EG](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: REFUGEES IN GABON -- AN UPDATE

REF: A. A) LIBREVILLE 310
[B](#). B) YAOUNDE 624
[C](#). C) KINSHASA 598

Classified By: POLCHIEF SCOTT TICKNOR FOR REASONS 1.5 D AND E.

[1](#). (C) SUMMARY: Ref Coord, PRM/A Program Assistant, and Poloff (Embassy Libreville) met with refugees in Libreville on April 14 to address resettlement, protection, and repatriation issues. In response to a small pro-settlement demonstration earlier in the week, we explained that the 41 cases our Overseas Processing Entity (OPE) had interviewed represented only the first tranche of a larger, but limited, program. We met with Pedro Pergentino Ekumu-Epitie, an Equato-Guinean lawyer who had gone into hiding. Finally, we dialogued with Congolese refugees in an attempt to ascertain why there was so little interest in repatriation. Despite assurances that their country was safe, the Congolese delegation remained reluctant to return home because of several cases of returning refugees who had disappeared or had been poisoned. End Summary.

Emotions Flare as Resettlement Processing Begins...

[2](#). (SBU) Accra's OPE arrived in Gabon on April 6 on its first ever trip to pre-screen 18 cases that had been referred to the U.S. resettlement program. Unfortunately, word soon reached the close-knit refugee community that these were the only cases that would ever be considered for resettlement. Some 26 refugees staged a non-violent protest in front of the UNHCR office, causing the OPE team to fear for its safety. Eventually, OPE decided to cancel its last three remaining interviews and leave the premises; the team departed for Cameroon on April 14.

[3](#). (SBU) During a meeting with refugees on April 14, Ref Coord, PRM/A Program Assistant, and Poloff assured those present that there would be other referrals for resettlement; this group only represented the first tranche. When pressed for numbers, we declined to be more specific, cautioning that only 1-2 percent of the refugees in the region were being resettled annually. (Note: We expect UNHCR to refer all of the eighty-one Equato-Guineans and some of the most vulnerable (non-military) Congolese to the U.S. resettlement program over the next six months. End note.)

...and an Equato-Guinean Goes Into Hiding

[4](#). (C) We also met briefly with Equato-Guinean lawyer Pedro Pergentino Ekumu-Epitie, an eloquent and passionate speaker. As noted in ref A, Pedro went into hiding at an undisclosed location after learning of the disappearance of two of his compatriots while they were in protective custody in Yaounde (ref B). Ref Coord assured him that he would do everything possible to expedite his case. (A DHS adjudicator is scheduled to arrive in Gabon on May 24.)

Congolese Reluctant To Repatriate

[5](#). (SBU) In separate meetings with Congolese refugees, we broached the subject of repatriation, noting various pronouncements (ref C) that refugees were welcome to return home. Refugees scoffed at any suggestion that they were economic migrants, noting the declining Gabonese economy, the

discriminatory environment against foreigners, and the difficulty of supporting themselves. Yet, as the Congolese explained, they were reluctant to repatriate primarily because of security concerns. Some cited the example of Colonel Antoine Mouity, allegedly killed by poisoning in 2002. Others mentioned the case of Colonel Simone Pierre Moussanda, who reportedly disappeared two months ago; he is believed to be either under arrest or in hiding. Subsequently, in a separate meeting with Poloff, refugees alleged that Colonel Narcisse Manguila had been killed on April 16. Though Manguila was not a refugee, he belonged to the same ethnic group as many of the Congolese refugees, who believe his demise was indicative of the dangers they would face if they repatriate. Privately, UNHCR Representative Benedict Akinola told us he had been disappointed at the meager results of his attempts to encourage repatriation, which totaled only about 700 during 2004, a small fraction of the 18,000 refugees and asylum seekers (14,000 from Congo-Brazzaville) living in Gabon. At this point, he foresaw little change in the attitudes of the refugees.

Comment

16. (SBU) We will continue to push for the appropriate durable solutions for the refugee community in Gabon. With local integration increasingly unlikely, repatriation remains a possibility for most Congolese, but it will require time and effort (and a prolonged absence of allegations of human rights abuses) to convince them it is safe to return home. Resettlement appears to be the only option for the beleaguered Equato-Guineans.

17. (U) For Brazzaville: Any information you can share that would substantiate or refute the allegations in paragraph 5 would be helpful.

18. (U) This message was cleared by Embassy Libreville and PRM/A Program Assistant Jennifer Christenson prior to transmission.
YATES

NNNN